An Archeological Survey Along Streams in Beaver and Texas Counties, Oklahoma

by Lee Bement

The following is an excerpt of the report on the results of a pedestrian survey along eight streams in Texas and Beaver counties, Oklahoma. This work was conducted by Staff Archeologist Leland Bement and student Scott Brosowske during the fall and winter of 2000 (Bement and Brosowske 2001).

The primary goal of the streams project was to identify cultural resources along intermittent and perennial water courses in Texas and Beaver counties, Oklahoma. Water resources included in this survey varied from springs to perennial streams to intermittent streams. Today, Kiowa, Coon, and Fulton creeks are perennial. The remaining streams were dry at the time of survey, although all contained pooled water marking the location of springs and seeps. It is likely that all eight streams included in the survey were perennially flowing prior to the advent of pump irrigation.

Results of the Survey

The pedestrian survey of 5360 acres along eight streams collected information on 86 sites. Thirty five of these are unknown prehistoric. The 51 remaining sites represent 105 components including three Paleoindian, 23 Archaic, 10 Plains Woodland, 18 Plains Village, and three Proto-historic/Historic Indian. Historic era sites also include one military camp, one bison hunter's camp, seven Pre-Statehood period Anglo occupations, and four Statehood period settlements.

Paleoindian period occupations were identified at three sites, only one of which was in a survey block. This site (34BV155) is located along Fulton Creek. Its identification as Paleoindian is based on the recovery of Plainview or Jimmy Allen points by a local collector. No other cultural materials are known from this locality, and no cultural material was found during survey. The Fulton Creek area, including Sand Creek contains numerous paleosols exposed in meander scars of both creeks. That some of these terrace remnants were of Pleistocene age is indicated by the recovery of mammoth remains adjacent to 34BV140. Also, radiocarbon dating of two buried A horizons beneath the Late Archaic levels at 34BV161 indicates that early Holocene and late Pleistocene deposits are common. Other than the confirmation of the presence of deposits of the correct age to contain Paleoindian-age materials, the Streams Project can offer little in understanding the distribution of these materials.

Archaic period sites and projectile point styles were widely scattered across the landscape and were found in association with springs, perennial streams, and intermittent streams. Twenty-three sites were identified with Archaic components. Of these, 19 were Late Archaic, three were Middle Archaic, and one was Early Archaic. These temporal assignments are based on the identification of point styles of known temporal association.

The Plains Woodland period is represented by two sites along Kiowa Creek, six along Fulton Creek, and one each along Hackberry and Frisco creeks for a total of ten sites. Artifact types diagnostic of the Woodland period include corner notched
These components are identified by the presence of European trade goods. Numerous accounts of historic Indian groups, including the Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanche, and Arapaho, in the Oklahoma panhandle suggest that more such sites should be present. Our inability to identify them may relate more to modern land use practices that have destroyed the most recent deposits (such as that seen at 34BV165) or, more likely, our inability to separate the Historic Indian from early Anglo sites, since both contain very similar material remains. In the case of 34BV128 and 34TX152, an age of protohistoric or historic was assigned based on the occurrence of historic material on Plains Village sites. Site 34BV165 did not have a discernible Plains Village component, but the site area was completely destroyed by oil drilling activity.

The Plains Village period is represented by 18 sites. These sites are predominately located along the major streams and their tributaries. In particular, Plains Village sites cluster along Kiowa Creek, Coon Creek, and Frisco Creek. At these locations, the sites are single component and located on Pleistocene terraces overlooking the modern floodplain. Undoubtedly these locations were chosen in respect to fertile agricultural soils with abundant water. Additional Plains Village components are found on sites with multiple components, usually including Late Archaic materials. These locations may represent short-term camps used by task groups on logistical forays for specific resources. Bison hunting would be one possible activity represented by these camps.

Plains Village period complexes for the Oklahoma and Texas panhandles include the stone slab structure-building Antelope Creek and Buried City complexes and the pithouse-building groups represented at the Odessa Yates site. Stone slabs similar to those used by Antelope Creek groups were only seen on sites along Frisco Creek in the far western portion of the project area. The large cluster of Plains Village sites in the eastern portion of the project area along Kiowa and Coon creeks were devoid of surface indications of slab construction. These sites may be related to the pithouse groups represented at the Odessa Yates site. The persistent recovery of Niobrara jasper on these sites further aligns them with Odessa Yates as opposed to Antelope Creek sites.

Protohistoric and Historic Indian period sites are represented by one and two sites, respectively. These components are identified by the presence of European trade goods. Numerous accounts of historic Indian groups, including the Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanche, and Arapaho, in the Oklahoma panhandle suggest that more such sites should be present. Our inability to identify them may relate more to modern land use practices that have destroyed the most recent deposits (such as that seen at 34BV165) or, more likely, our inability to separate the Historic Indian from early Anglo sites, since both contain very similar material remains. In the case of 34BV128 and 34TX152, an age of protohistoric or historic was assigned based on the occurrence of historic material on Plains Village sites. Site 34BV165 did not have a discernible Plains Village component, but the site area was completely destroyed by oil drilling activity.

Historic sites within the project area can be divided into categories of military, buffalo hunting, Indian Territory settlement, and early statehood. A single site with identifiable military artifacts was found along Hackberry Creek. This site, 34TX138, possibly relates to the Sheridan winter campaign of 1868 or possibly early 1870s activity from Camp Supply.

Historic bison hunting is responsible for site 34BV166 along Sand Creek. Whether the site is a buffalo hide hunters camp, Indian camp, or military camp remains to be established. We do know that the inhabitants hunted and killed numerous bison in the vicinity, cooked some of the bison, and in addition to the bison bones, threw a clear glass bottle into one of two fires at the camp. The presence of manganese oxide in the glass composition places a minimum age of 1875 on the use of this site. Likewise, the presence of bison remains indicates the camp was used prior to the elimination of this animal from the area between 1880 and 1885. This site is actively eroding and remains under close scrutiny for the recovery of cultural material.

Site 34TX156 is an early ranch headquarters dating to the 1870s. This site represents one of the earliest ranching endeavors for the area. The stone structures at this site continued to be occupied through the 1890s and probably into the 1900s. Similar age sites recorded during the course of this project are represented by numerous dugouts. Many of these dugouts appear on the 1890 GLO maps, indicating habitation during that time. Others not shown on the GLO survey probably represent post-1890 construction. An example is 34BV126, a possible stage stop or freighter stop at a spring near Coon Creek. This site contains several dugouts and a light scatter of historic debris. No record of this site could be found and it does not appear on the GLO maps.

Several early twentieth century homesteads represent early Statehood period inhabitants. Site 34BV118 along Coon Creek is a site that spans the pre-Statehood period dugout construction and post-Statehood construction of a frame house by the same family. Both of these structures have been razed, and a third house is now the home of a descendent of the original inhabitants.

Petroglyphs were found at two sites, 34BV167 and 34BV168. Petroglyphs, including a hand print, geomorphic lines, and a possible anthropomorphic figure, were pecked into sandstone blocks along an exposure of the Dakota formation. Unfortunately, this sandstone is highly friable and wind and water erosion is erasing the glyphs. No temporal assignment is possible for either set of glyphs. A thin scatter of prehistoric debitage covers both site areas. Both sites are near the protohistoric/historic age site 34BV165. These are the first petroglyph sites recorded for Beaver County.
Modeling Site Distributions

One component of the stream project was the collection of information to aid in the construction of a model to predict the location of cultural resources along streams in Beaver and Texas counties. Toward this end, the survey areas were placed along eight streams distributed from east to west across Beaver and Texas counties. Three of these streams (Kiowa, Fulton, and Coldwater) flow directly into the Beaver River. The remaining five (Indian, Coon, Sand, Hackberry, and Frisco) feed into other streams. Sites were found along all eight streams. Having said this, however, there are some differences in the kinds of sites and their distribution within the study area.

The single Paleoindian period site was located along the perennial Fulton Creek. Archaic period sites are distributed across all three water resources, being found at springs, along perennial streams, and along intermittent streams. Plains Woodland period sites were found only along perennial streams. Likewise, Plains Village period sites were found along perennial streams. In an effort to refine the nuances in the distribution of sites for particular time periods, the streams were measured for width and slope. As expected, the larger streams, including Kiowa, Coldwater and Frisco creeks, have among the larger floodplain widths and more gradual slopes. The narrowest streams also had the highest slope. These are Fulton and Sand creeks. The remaining streams (Indian, Coon, and Hackberry creeks) have intermediate floodplain widths and slope.

When the site distribution is viewed according to the floodplain width and slope of the various drainages, only general patterns emerge (Table 1). The single component Plains Village and Plains Woodland sites are found predominantly along the larger streams. Undoubtedly the wider floodplain offers more patches of fertile soil for horticultural pursuits. These areas also have the deepest deposits, capable of masking older sites. The highest number of Archaic period sites are found along the narrowest and steepest streams, namely Fulton and Sand creeks. These narrow floodplains possess few patches of fertile soil for horticultural pursuits. The higher slope is in part a product of the steepness of the surrounding terrain. As such, these areas tend to have shallow soils and large exposures of terrace areas. Any sites present along these creeks had a higher chance of being located by pedestrian survey. This alone does not account for why the prehistoric groups were there in the first place, however. The reasons for the dense Archaic period presence along Fulton Creek are unknown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stream</th>
<th>Floodplain Width</th>
<th>Channel Slope</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indian Creek</td>
<td>0.5 km</td>
<td>0.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiowa Creek</td>
<td>1.0 km</td>
<td>0.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coon Creek</td>
<td>0.5 km</td>
<td>0.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton Creek</td>
<td>0.2 km</td>
<td>0.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand Creek</td>
<td>0.1 km</td>
<td>0.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hackberry Creek</td>
<td>0.5 km</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coldwater Creek</td>
<td>1.0 km</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frisco Creek</td>
<td>0.7 km</td>
<td>0.45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The intermediate streams are enigmatic. Coon Creek has a high density of Plains Village period sites, whereas similar Indian and Hackberry creeks are nearly devoid of sites of any time period. The floodplains along all three have identical widths and contain large areas of fertile soil. The stream channel slope is highest for Coon Creek, yet this is the creek with the high Plains Village site density. These three streams do, however, have Archaic sites, and these are found near springs. Given the high density of Plains Village sites along Coon Creek and the similar settings along Indian and Hackberry creeks, it is not clear why there is such a discrepancy in site density. Perhaps the larger sites along Kiowa Creek drew inhabitants to those resources, leaving Indian Creek in the hinterlands. Likewise, perhaps the resources along Palo Duro Creek overshadowed those on Hackberry Creek. Since Palo Duro Creek was not sampled by this project, perhaps this aspect of the association between major and minor streams can be tested in the future.

The research design presented for this project predicted the likelihood that trade items from the southwestern United States would be found. The only exotic materials found during the survey were obsidian artifacts. Additional obsidian artifacts were documented in the collections of local collectors. Samples of obsidian were submitted for source analysis. Of particular interest is the dual direction indicated in the trade or acquisition of obsidian. Obsidian either originated in the southwestern
sources in New Mexico or in the northwestern sources in Idaho and Wyoming. The sourcing of temporally diagnostic projectile points indicates Archaic period groups obtained obsidian from Idaho, Wyoming, and the Valle Grande sources in New Mexico. During Plains Village times, obsidian is more restricted to the Cerro Toledo area in New Mexico, although other sources are utilized. This may represent the scavenging of obsidian from local Archaic period sites. The mechanisms of obsidian movement through time in the Oklahoma panhandle remain conjectural, vacillating between trade and direct procurement. What is certain, though, is that obsidian movement into the Oklahoma panhandle has time depth. As such, modeling this movement may best be understood within an evolutionary framework.

In conclusion, the survey of streams in Texas and Beaver counties in the Oklahoma panhandle documented a plethora of cultural resources. The eclectic nature, in both time and cultural origins, highlights the richness of these resources and the need for continued inventorying efforts and research investigations in this region.

References

Bement, Leland C., and Scott D. Brosowske